

RESIDENTIAL ALIENATION, HOME OWNERSHIP AND THE LIMITS OF SHELTER POLICY

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I

There is greater public confusion over housing policy today than there has been in any comparable period in the last thirty years. The Nixon-Ford administration's wholesale program terminations and budget slashes only cloak the problem temporarily. Everyone agrees that the ostrich ought to get his head out of the sand, but few agree where he should go once he does so. Housing allowances, at this point, seem to many the best answer;¹ at least they haven't been proven wanting yet. But others disagree,² and certainly there is reason to be wary.³

The problem today is but the extension of a realization that began to appear already shortly after the Second World War, and that was already explicitly formulated in the fifties. Before the war, building public housing was seen as the obvious answer to the most serious part of the nation's housing problem. But by 1957 Catherine Bauer was speaking of public housing's "dreary deadlock."⁴ *Commentary* magazine published Herbert Gans' criticism of urban renewal in 1969,⁵ and Chester Hartman's exposes of relocation practices and problems began the year before.⁶ A public housing project in Newark was at the center of the nation's first major ghetto rebellion in 1965. Pruitt-Igoe, the high-rise public housing project in St. Louis, which won an architectural award when it was built, was already in trouble five years later, trouble which has finally culminated in the physical demolition of many of the units by the Housing Authority this year.

The theory on which present policy is founded, with we may call the "shelter theory of housing"--if theory is the right term to describe a miscellaneous assortment of operating assumptions--goes something like this: Every American deserves "a decent home in a suitable neighborhood." A decent house is defined, substantially, as one that is not substandard, i.e., one that is not dilapidated and has piped hot and cold water inside the structure and an inside flush toilet and bath (or shower) for the exclusive use of the occupants of the unit.⁸ Providing such a home is the goal of national housing policy. The shortfall from that goal is readily measurable: Take the number of families now in substandard units, add the number in standard units who are overcrowded, add enough to get a suitable vacancy rate, and there you have the need. To get the amount of subsidy that should be provided,

subtract the number of people at income level X from the number of dwelling units available at rentals suitable to X, repeat for each income level, and there's that figure.

Criticism of this shelter theory of housing has not increased as fast as criticism of its results, and no new comprehensive theory of housing has been formulated to replace it. True, Wallace Smith, in the opening chapters of his recent *Housing*,⁹ has begun to point out some of the key ingredients of such a theory, although he focuses his attention on only one, the economic. Herbert Gans, William Grigsby, Chester Hartman, Jack Seeley, some leading scholars and practitioners at the University of California at Berkeley, at Harvard-MIT, and at the Urban Institute in Washington are among those who have been beginning to grapple with some of these problems on a theoretical level. A number of perceptive public officials have dealt imaginatively with some of them, with varying success, in the real world.

The increasing attention being focused by government on problems of racial discrimination in the suburbs, on problems of housing management, tenant participation in public housing, relationships to schools and other social services, rent-paying ability as well as expanding homeownership opportunities, are all likewise evidences of a shift in the theory underlying housing policy. And sociologists in general have long recognized that social-psychological categories such as social status, self-image, feelings of belonging, anomie, public-relatedness, security, social cohesion, and others, have significant relevance to problems of housing, although there has been little good work attempting to draw out policy conclusions from these findings.

But no unified theory of the role of housing in this context has yet emerged. Nor will it emerge from this paper. It is my purpose only here to single out five key components that would require inclusion in such a new, holistic theory. I shall try to highlight their importance and put them in perspective by using the concept of alienation as a framework for the discussion.

II

Alienation is a concept of many meanings, among them the quite different ones given it by sociology, by law, and by philosophy. In this paper it is used for suggestive purposes only; the discussion is not intended to contribute to the understanding or elaboration of the concept of alienation, but to contribute perhaps a new insight or two to the concept of housing.

It is indeed curious that the idea of alienation is so scarce in the housing literature. Intuitively, it belongs there, almost uniquely.

Standard discussions speak of alienation as not "feeling at home;" the concept of "at home" appears the exact opposite of alienation. Would there be a housing problem if everyone really felt "at home" in the housing they occupied? If the shelter aspects of housing no longer seem an insurmountable problem and public policy yet has admittedly failed in coming to grips with "the housing problem," the concept of alienation seems *prima facie* a fruitful avenue to explore.

A few words on definition are first necessary so that the following discussion can be properly understood. "Alienation" is a term of many meanings. Eric and Mary Johnson¹⁰ draw a useful distinction between an alienating condition outside of the individual and the resulting state of alienation in the individual. "Self-alienation," at least as it will be used here, describes the state of being alienated, perhaps the prevailing use of the term.

In the phrases "residential alienation," or "social alienation," as used here, the term alienation describes conditions of alienation. It has the narrow sense of describing a relationship between an individual and something else--as in the Oxford Dictionary's definition of the verb: "to convert¹¹ into an alien or stranger... (I, 21)." An object outside but related to the individual must be stated for the condition of alienation to have meaning. This paper is essentially concerned with following the analogies suggested between the condition of alienation of an individual from the product of his labor, on the one hand, and his alienation from his home, on the other hand. The latter is here called residential alienation. In the same way, "social alienation" refers here to the separation between the individual and society, the individual and the community, to conditions of alienation which give rise to the state of self-alienation between a person and his/her social self. Some of these concepts are discussed further below, but to summarize the usage in this paper:

"Residential alienation" here means the condition of estrangement between a person and his/her dwelling;

"Social alienation" means the condition of estrangement between a person and his/her community;

"Self-alienation" refers broadly to the state of alienation in the individual.

Self-alienation, in the Hegelian sense,¹² means a rupture with that unselfconscious state in which it was "quite common for people to conceive of themselves primarily in terms of the roles they occupy and the groups in which they live. Their identification with these roles and groups is not conscious and deliberate; rather it is immediate and un-

reflective. Their relation to the social substance is one of complete and immediate unity." The antithesis to this unity comes about when the individual is "driven back into himself out of his actuality."¹³ Hegel considered this to be "a desirable development, in that it marks the emergence of a dimension of distinct individuality and independent existence, which is necessary if man's essential nature is to be realized completely...the individual now views the substance as something 'external and opposed' to him. It has become alien in his eyes; or as Hegel now says, it is 'alienated'."¹⁴ The task then becomes to overcome this alienation, to achieve a synthesis of the original unselfconscious, unreflective unity with the new alienated but independent individual state in some higher form.

The potential analogy with housing emerges clearly when we consider the parallel development of the condition of alienation between the individual and external things. Here, the thing, having been separated from the individual, seen as alien and apart from him, must now be re-absorbed, reintegrated, its unity with him re-established.

Hegel then uses the word "property" to comprehend the "embodiment of freedom" in objective reality. He speaks of taking possession of things, as we might speak of "making a home," in three different ways: "we take possession of a thing (a) by directly grasping it physically, (b) by forming it, and (c) by merely marking it as ours."¹⁵

Schacht summarizes:

"The first of these three ways, he says, is 'only subjective, temporary, and seriously restricted in scope.' And the third is a 'very indeterminate' mode of taking possession, which in reality 'is not actual but is only representative.' It is thus the second--that of 'forming' the thing--which is of the greatest significance. 'When I impose a form on something, the thing's determinant character as mine acquires an independent externality...' The thing's relation to me is neither fleeting nor superficial, for it is essentially transformed through my productive or 'forming' activity in such a way that it bears my imprint. I have 'put my will into it;' I have made it reflect my will and my personality... through the 'forming' activity of production, therefore, I both secure for myself an objective domain of property in which my freedom can be exercised, and give objective expression to my personality."¹⁶

Others speak of unalienated labor in much the same sense. Marx, for instance, wrote that production is "the direct activity of individuality." Through the production of objects the individual "repro-

duces himself...actively and in a real sense, and he sees his own reflection in a world which he has constructed, ...this accomplishes his 'self-realization'." The things he produces are "objectifications of himself," which "confirm and realize his individuality." ¹⁷

In the same tradition, the product of labor is spoken of as being alienated when "it exists independently, outside its producer, i.e., outside of his control, and alien to him." Two outside powers render it alien and outside of his control: the first is the power of the person for whom it is produced; this comes about for the product of labor when, not its actual producer, but "another alien, hostile, powerful and independent man is lord of this object."¹⁸ Typically that man will be the employer; in the housing analogy, the landlord is in the comparable position.¹⁹ The second outside power which renders the product of his labor alien and beyond the control of its immediate producer is an "inhuman power," "the set of laws governing capital and the market."²⁰

This set of concepts is extraordinarily suggestive if applied to the evolution of housing. Primitive shelter arrangements indeed represent what may be called an unself-conscious unity between the shelter and its occupant. Increasing attention is being focused today on what we call "architecture without architects," a phrase which itself suggests the kind of immediate and unreflective unity to which Hegel refers. Some distinction can no doubt be made among the intricate construction of a hummingbird's hanging nest or of a beehive, the hollowed-out cave, and the cliff dwelling of the pueblos, the African village construction forms, or the Middle Eastern towns of the second millenium B.C., but, whatever their deficiencies as shelter or their virtues as art, alienated in this sense from their occupants they were not.

The change from this unself-conscious "architecture" to a separation of the shelter from the occupant was a late historical development. The self-conscious construction of buildings by specialized individuals, for occupancy or use by others than themselves, might be seen in several ways. Historically, neither the Greek temples nor the Gothic cathedrals seem alienated from their users or their society. Whether such structures represent an over-coming of the original alienation through art, or represent a continuation of the earlier pre-alienated status on a collective level, is an interesting question, but not necessary for our ultimate point. Neither need we resolve here the equally interesting and even less explored question of the relationship between the Greek slave or medieval serf and his shelter--a plausible formulation might speak of alienation as a relevant concept here also, but of shelter as, over-all, playing a less important role, and having less expected of it, than in today's society. What is important here, for our purposes, is that the philosophic concept of the original alienation is suggestive in our setting, seen as the making conscious to the

occupant of his condition of housing and its separation from a "natural" unity with its occupant.

The resolution of this alienation in the housing field is likewise suggested by the language which discusses its resolution in the production of other things: Recall the formulation about "forming the thing; " its "reflecting my will and my personality," the production of objects as a man "reproducing himself," "seeing his own reflection in a world which he has constructed." Is not the ideal home one in which its occupant will "confirm and realize his individuality?" Is it not precisely this characteristic which places us in common in a Roman villa or an English castle, a log cabin or a Dutch Burger's house in Vermeer's day, a house by Frank Lloyd Wright or an office building by Mies van der Rohe, an African bushman's hut or Monticello? And is it not, in a very significant sense, precisely because Pruitt-Igoe permitted no such self-expression, precisely because it reflected in its structure and purpose and mode of occupancy an alien setting, so alien to its occupants, that it finally had to come down?

But the fact that Pruitt-Igoe is an alien environment is not precisely a new discovery; if this is all that the excursion into philosophic analogies can show us, it has not gotten us far. Fortunately, the suggestive features of the analogy go further. A closer look at residential alienation is richly suggestive of the details of the problem.

III

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The discussion of alienation in philosophy suggests that residential alienation may have three components:

First, the inability of a person to form, to shape, his/her own dwelling, to express his/her individuality in it;

Second, the subjection of the individual's dwelling to the control of alien outside powers; and

Third, the inability to mark or symbolically manifest the individual's ownership in his/her dwelling.

The translation of these forms of alienation into more conventional housing questions is obvious: Is the home one which the occupant has helped to plan, to design, to build, to decorate? Does the home reflect the personality of its occupant--does it represent the individual's self-image to him/herself, or to others? Does he/she control the own home, who may enter it, how it may be used, how long he/she will stay in it, and what he/she will do with it on leaving it? Is the house "his" or

"ners," does the occupant "own" it, as well as merely have temporary possession of it?

It would be hard to list a series of questions more important for housing policy, or more unfortunately neglected by it, than these. This section will examine them in terms of the first component of alienation. Section IV will then look at the second and third components of alienation, and Section V then review homeownership, as one possible answer to the problems here presented, and see whether it does not raise an even deeper question: the relationship between housing policy and social alienation.

The typical urban apartment today certainly is in no sense "formed, molded, or shaped" by its occupant. It resists whatever efforts he might make along these lines. The simple physical characteristics of housing in a modern urban industrial setting virtually precludes it. Economics further encourage standardization and mass production at the expense of individualization. Even with single-family houses, very few occupants get involved in the construction of their own dwellings. With prefabricated assemble-it-yourself houses, experience²² has shown that most families prefer the manufacturer's work for them. None but the very well-to-do²³ retain an architect to design their own house to their own specifications.

The ability to select a house to one's own taste does not overcome the alienating effect of the inability to design or construct it. The shortage of housing limits the range of choice, particularly for the poor. Normal market forces encourage uniformity in new housing construction. Many more pressing needs than self-expression dictate most families' choice of a house or apartment.

Yet the struggle to overcome this alienation of his/her dwelling at the time of its construction or purchase is evident everywhere. The do-it-yourself boom has made housing maintenance and improvement and repair a major business in the United States, averaging over a billion dollars a year in volume.²⁴ Single-family owner-occupants typically pick the colors of their own house, inside and out; fix patios, lawns, gardens; panel basements, create dens, build dormer windows and convert attic space; install shelves and closets and bins and chutes; fix windows and doors, sand floors, lay linoleum or rugs; add porches, carports, garages and driveways; and so forth and so on.

But how successful these efforts to convert alien housing into homes are is a matter of some doubt. The limits on its success are several. The first and most important is one of class. Do-it-yourself home improvements take money, leisure, skills, and a certain type of motivation, all items as to which the poor are in short supply.²⁵ Secondly, no accurate breakdown is available as to the proportion of this type

of effort that is required for routine repairs and maintenance, and the proportion that goes into efforts that the doer really finds creative and rewarding. Many a homeowner would undoubtedly rather be able to pay someone else than have to paint his/her own house on vacation, or mow the lawn on Saturday afternoon, or fix the leaky sink after supper.

Thirdly, there are rigid externally-imposed limits on the scope of creativity and individuality in such efforts. The front lawns and house plantings of a typical new development of suburban homes indicates the effect of non-legal and informal pressures, even where the deed does not contain restrictions, as one southern California developer's does, limiting the front yard planting to two identical-sized palm *Californicus*. Social pressures and market characteristics create strong incentives to standardization even in those areas where physically the expression of personality might be possible; care of the front lawn, choice of house color, style, size, construction materials, are all items where flexibility is limited by what the neighbors will accept, what the friends will²⁶ consider appropriate, what social status will allow, and, ultimately, what the market will recompense. Fourthly, if all this is true for a middle and upper-income single-family homeowner, it is all the more true for lower-income families or the owner-occupant of an apartment. Physical limitations of multi-family structures are even greater than for the detached, single-family house, and the landlord embodies in one person all of the limitations that economics, social pressures, and building codes and other legal restrictions together create for the single-family owner-occupant.

Yet even granting all these limits on the creativity and individuality a person can express in his dwelling, what opportunities to overcome alienation through work in the house there are seem to be avidly grasped. We all know personally many people who do in fact spend hours happily working around their house or in their garden, putting real ego into their efforts, looking forward to getting home from work to get back to their projects, spending weekends and vacations on them. Are not such do-it-yourself home improvement projects the very essence of creative, voluntary, unalienated work, and do they not in fact make a home very much the personal, unique, ego-involving kind of place that overcomes residential alienation? And when we see a homeowner cheerfully mowing the lawn, trimming the hedge, painting the house, or fixing the roof, aren't we intuitively certain that here, at least, is no problem of alienation?

Yet is it really so? The issue is one that involves the definition of creativity. Filling in the colors on a pre-numbered, pre-drawn canvas is "creative" in a way, but it is not the same thing as painting an original picture. Is do-it-yourself activity around the house more like the former or the latter?

Certainly the alienating social and technological limits on creative expression through shaping the dwelling are real, and cannot, with the best will in the world, be so easily overcome by individual action. Going back to the analogy with alienation from the product of labor, it is clear there that the development of the productive processes requires great technological capacity for production today, and greater collective control over the relations of production. Alienation from the product of labor can no longer be the simple shoemaker buying leather, converting it into a shoe on his own last and then selling it himself. Yet the do-it-yourself projects of the home handyperson are akin to such an attempt to get back to earlier and much simpler forms of production, and to ignore the complexity of the relations embodied in modern production through simple individual personal activity. It is as if the answer to the alienation of the worker in the shoe factory were to go back to being a cobbler.

More broadly, the question may be raised whether all of the hobby type of activities currently widely engaged in under the name of creativity, running from home improvement to macrame to gourmet cooking to pottery to handweaving to organic gardening, are not similarly efforts to recapture a lost unity at a level no longer historically possible. Creativity in any of the areas of life that matter must today be inherently social in nature, not individualistic and isolated. This is not to say that they will not be uniquely personal and expressive of the distinct personality of each individual, but only to say they must take place in a social fabric and through social means, as part of a social process, not in opposition or isolation from it. C. Wright Mills speaks of the "trivialization" of craftsmanship into hobbies;²⁷ one might similarly speak of the trivialization of creativity in the shaping of one's own home into puttering around the house.

What is needed, then, is a public policy that maximizes, both on the individual and the social level, the ability of the individual to express himself in his housing. A diversity of real choice, a lessening of uniformity; an involvement in pre-construction planning, an encouragement of the unique and unconventional, on the individual level; and on the social level, the opportunity for real and effective participation in the collective decisions that shape the residential environment--these are the goals that a public policy aimed at reducing residential alienation by restoring the ability to shape the residential environment and creatively mold it to each individual's desires must seek.

IV

The alienating effect of control of one's home by an outsider is hard to deny. The slumlord, the petty landlady, the arbitrary housing authority, the inaccessible estate, personify the problem for the tenant.

The villainous mortgagee twirling his mustache as the auctioneer's hammer comes down at the farm door in a way typifies the same problem for the owner-occupant, or at least did 35 years ago. Today the mortgagor is much more likely to be an institution, the fear of foreclosure less prevalent. Yet the risk of defaults and foreclosure is still real, as thousands of purchasers under the Section 235 program can attest, and legal restrictions created by deed in favor of mortgagees, developers or development associations, neighbors, or utility companies are still prevalent.

Underlying most of these restrictions and motivating their structure and their enforcement, if not always visibly or directly, lies the market, the economic laws that dictate the price of housing, and that will largely determine the actual conduct of landlords, mortgagees and occupants, as well as neighbors.

The impact of the market is filtered down to the tenant through the landlord, by restrictions in the lease or changes in the rent. The tenant sees market restrictions through the conduct of a human party with whom he/she must contend in facing these efforts. For the owner-occupant, the situation is different. At least to the extent that a home is purchased as an investment--and study after study has shown this to be a major motivating factor in the purchase decision--to the extent that a house is seen as a commodity which has been bought and will be sold again, precisely to that extent will what is done with it be determined by the market and the owner's perception of the market. If adding a two-car garage or a swimming pool will enhance the value of the property, that is an incentive for making these changes. If planting pole beans in the front yard depreciates the value of the property, the owner will be little likely to do it, and if he/she does, he/she will hear from the neighbors.²⁸ Whatever theoretical legal rights he/she may have to shape his/her own dwelling will in fact be sharply restricted for the homeowner by the iron and "inhuman" laws of the market. No human landlord is around with whom he/she can argue about whether the door can be painted red or beans planted; the market is a force with which he/she cannot argue and of whose impact he/she cannot be certain. Just as the product is alienated from its producer when it comes under the sway of an "alien hostile power," housing is alienated from a homeowner because a homeowner, too, in fact finds it separated from him/her through domination by the market. Marx's illustration of the dealer in minerals who sees in minerals "only their commercial value, not their beauty or their particular characteristics" is no doubt an appropriate analogy for the view taken of their suburban homes by many wearers of grey flannel suits, and to some extent creeps into the attitudes of most money-conscious homeowners.

Not only the market, but a myriad of social restrictions, many

of them inevitable in a complex urban society, control what an occupant may do in and with a dwelling. Building codes, zoning codes, fire regulations, breach of the peace and nuisance statutes, health codes, respect for the privacy or the sensibilities of neighbors, the condition of the streets, the quality of police protection, the availability of recreational, educational, transportation, and other facilities--all these will have major impact on the extent to which an individual can do what he/she wants in and with "his" or "her" home.

The residential alienation created by landlord ownership is an aspect of alienated housing with which public policy has very recently begun to deal in the lower-income field. The provisions in the Housing Act of 1968 providing subsidies for homeownership attempt to eliminate the landlord-tenant relationship entirely for many families. So did the prior pioneering attempts in public housing, through the Turnkey III program. Urban homesteading and tenant cooperative programs go in this direction. Where the landlord cannot be eliminated entirely, reforms have been instituted in some public housing programs eliminating the arbitrary exercise of controls by the landlord. Continuing attacks through the courts and in state legislatures have modified some of the most one-sided and resented of landlords' legal powers, and to impose legally on them some of the obligations most tenants feel are theirs morally.

Yet the broader and equally alienating limitations on control imposed by the more impersonal and social forces have hardly been touched by any deliberate public policy. Again, social action is called for--what only last year was quite respectably called community control, which has apparently fallen much into disfavor in this year's fashion. Whatever its problems, its ultimate relationship to residential alienation must be recognized and dealt with in any successful housing policy.

V

But the symbolic importance of homeownership deserves a closer look. Perhaps it does achieve a "marking" of the home as "belonging to" an owner in some direct, human, unalienated sense that has value in and of itself? It does not take much research or argument to convince us that living in someone else's house is not as comfortable, as secure, as satisfactory as owning one's own home. Living in someone else's house is living in alienated housing, in the strict legal meaning of the word as well as in the philosophic sense.

Public policy has dealt with this form of residential alienation more directly--if not under that name--than with any of the others we have mentioned. From the days of the founding fathers on, the protection and extension of homeownership has been espoused by the country's leaders. The greatest housing subsidies, those created by the pro-

visions of the Internal Revenue Code, are reserved for homeowners. The Housing Act of 1968 for the first time attempted deliberately to extend the benefits of homeownership to those previously thought too poor to obtain them. But the question rarely has been asked as to precisely what benefits are to accrue from this basic policy. Does homeownership indeed overcome residential alienation by permitting the owner to "mark" the house as his/hers?

The effects of homeownership on alienation may be considered under two headings: real effects, and what may be called "magical" or symbolic effects.

The package of real relationships between a person and his dwelling may for convenience be divided into three bundles: the physical, i.e., those arising out of actual physical possession and occupancy of the premises; the legal, i.e., those arising out of private law relations--lease, deed, mortgage, covenants, contracts; and social, i.e., those arising out of public law or informal social, political, or economic conditions.²⁹ If giving the occupant legal title to a unit is a form of "marking" it which will bring with it not only symbolic strength but also an increase in real power over that unit, it can indeed be an important weapon in overcoming residential alienation.

Ownership is a complex legal concept, and I have elsewhere suggested that it might be taken to be a bundle of rights, powers, privileges and immunities which could be grouped under ten key attributes: rights (using the term generically) to occupy for basic shelter, and for use for other purposes; control; security; disposition; privacy;³⁰ maintenance; secondary and neighborhood services, and so forth. The points made there are relevant here. To summarize: the mere switch from a lease to a deed does not in and of itself necessarily provide a greater bundle of rights to the owner than a tenant may have; a good lease, in other words, may provide many more advantages to a tenant than a deed subject to a mortgage under many conditions will provide to an owner. The most important of the attributes of the tenure relationship are in fact more affected by the characteristics of the occupant--particularly his income--the public and community services available, legislation governing occupancy rights, and the characteristics of the neighborhood and the community, than they are by tenure forms. His privacy, for instance, will be more determined by the attitude of the police than by the contents of the deed to his house.

"Ownership" is thus far from the type of absolute relationship that we have in mind when we say "a man's home is his castle;" it is in fact the creature of, and subject to the whims of, public policy, governmental action, neighborhood changes, economic conditions, market forces, city budgets, federal and state legislation, private organizational

actions, union practices, building codes, insurance rates and regulations, bank policies, social standards, technological developments, and so forth and so on.

Private legal relationships that are encompassed within the conventional meaning of the term "homeownership" are thus a decreasing determinant of an occupant's relationship with his dwelling, and social and public law considerations are an increasing determinant. The mark of title is no longer as effective as it once was, and public policy, if it is to deal with residential alienation, must convey to the occupant today many rights, powers, privileges and immunities which bare legal title will not give him. Again, a real voice in the making of the broader social decisions that affect his residential environment is what is needed for the alienated resident to permit him/her to impose a "mark" on his/her dwelling that has much real meaning.

If a deed is taken to be the way in which a house is "marked" as the occupant's, then the marking is indeed a very "indeterminate" mode of taking possession, "not actual but only representative." Since homeownership is not put forward as an objective of public policy for its legal effects alone and has symbolic or marginal meaning as well, its "representative" aspect warrants further exploration. Anthropologists tell us that many people believed knowing the name of an object gave power over that object; the naming of things was a magical act recognized as potent of itself. The view of homeownership held by some today has a relationship to this magical notion; independent of the actual legal powers given to an owner by his deed, homeownership has symbolic value of itself:

"For a man who owns his own home acquires with it a new dignity. He begins to take pride in what is his own, and pride in conserving and improving it for his children. He becomes a more steadfast and concerned citizen of his community. He becomes more self-confident and self-reliant. The mere act of becoming a homeowner transforms him. It gives him roots, a sense of belonging, a true state in his community and its well-being." ³¹

"The mere act of becoming a homeowner transforms him." Why? What is it that homeownership symbolizes to have this effect?

Well, in the first place, homeownership carries with it a connotation of independence, of freedom and security and status, that harkens back to the days of the settling of the country, the opening of the West, the Homestead Act and the family farm. Listen again to Senator Percy:

"Ever since the Pilgrims set foot on Plymouth Rock, homeownership has been an integral part of the America Way of Life. Long before the rise of the great cities, our forbears came to America because America held forth the bountiful promise of land--land a man could afford, land whose produce could make a man independent of the great lord of the estate, land on which a man could build his own home and there raise his family in self-reliance and security.

" A century and more ago, the issue was between freehold and land tenantry. Today, in urbanized America, the context is different, but the basic principle involved is exactly the same. The freeholder of the 19th century becomes the homeowner of the 20th, and the tenant farmer of an earlier day becomes the man with no choice but to rent his dwelling from another. Just as the giants of the 19th century favored freehold, the leaders of the mid-20th must fight with determination to bring the opportunity for actual homeownership within the reach of every American.³²

The idea of homeownership here carries with it the nostalgic remembrance of an earlier, unalienated time, a simpler and better life free of all the alienating problems of a complex technological urban system, a throwback to a time when each individual controlled his/her own life and no alien outside forces dominated the scene.

This is, of course, deceptive symbolism, far from reality. Alienation cannot so easily be overcome. The freeholders of the 19th century are not at all similar to the homeowners of the Twentieth. The former often built their own cabins, dug their own wells, grew their own food, put fires out with water from their own ponds, left their land once a week to go marketing, had their family home to work the land, cut their own wood for fuel, protected themselves with their own rifles, and took care of other needs in their own outhouses. Most of these same activities are practically impossible in most parts of America today, where they are not illegal or in violation of the sanitary of building codes. We rely today on the public provision of water, sewers, garbage disposal, recreational opportunities, transportation, police and fire protection, and so on and on and on. What would we think of someone who could say, in 1968, "the best protection for a person's basic rights are those he can erect himself?"*

* President Nixon said it on April 25, 1968!

The average homeowner is higher status, better paid, better educated, richer, more middle class, than the average tenant. Consequently, the change from tenant to homeowner increases the likelihood that the individual will be taken to a higher status, well paid, well educated, and middle class. After all, homeownership is one of the three indices of a higher socio-economic status in the Shevsky Bell schema, and has similar connotations in virtually every discussion of class stratification.³³ Can one blame poor tenants for trying to achieve homeownership in order to get a higher SES rating so that they can show how high in social standing they are, any more than one can blame poor students for trying to get a high mark on an exam as a way of showing how educated they are?

Finally, homeownership symbolizes the single-family house, with its own yard, its privacy, its personal scale, its amenability to individual physical control. In reviewing the extensive literature exploring empirically people's preferences for housing recently, one finds none that might enable a curious researcher to separate the attractiveness of homeownership from the attractiveness of the single-family house. Typical are the findings of a Detroit study: 73% of all those interviewed preferred homeownership to tenancy, and when asked why, 90% said they wanted a private yard of their own.

Herbert Hoover brilliantly summarizes the entire symbolic content of homeownership exactly 40 years ago, in The President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership:

I am confident that the sentiment for home ownership is so embedded in the American heart that the millions of people who dwell in tenements, apartments, and rented rows of solid brick have the aspiration for wider opportunity in ownership of their own homes. To possess one's own home is the hope and ambition of almost every individual in our country, whether he lives in hotel, apartment, or tenement.

Everyone of you here is impelled by the high ideal and aspiration that each family may pass their days in the home which they own; that they may nurture it as theirs; that it may be their castle in all that exquisite sentiment which it surrounds with the sweetness of family life. This aspiration penetrates the heart of our national well-being. It makes for happier married life, it makes for better children, it makes for confidence and security, it makes for courage to meet the battle of life, it makes for better citizenship. There can be no fear for a democracy or self-government or for liberty or freedom from

home owners no matter how humble they may be.

There is wide distinction between homes and mere housing. Those immortal ballads, "Home, Sweet Home," "My Old Kentucky Home," and "The Little Gray Home In The West," were not written about tenements or apartments. They are the expressions of racial longing which find outlet in the living poetry and songs of our people. They were written about an individual abode, alive with the tender associations of childhood, the family life at the fireside, the free out-of-doors, the independence, the security, and the pride in possession of the family's own home--the very seat of its being.

That our people should live in their own homes is a sentiment deep in the heart of our race and of American life. We know that, as yet, is not universally possible. We know that many of our people must at all times live under other conditions. But they never sing songs about a pile of rent receipts. To own one's home is a physical expression of individualism, of enterprise, of independence, and of the freedom of spirit. We do not in our imagination attach to a transitory place that expression about a man's home being his castle, no matter what its constitutional rights may be.

Whether support by public policy of this type of symbolism is an effective mark of ownership is open to real question. Homeownership carries with it certain, if limited, real legal differences which lessen somewhat the alienating characteristics of the stereotyped landlord/tenant relationship. Many other social areas of control could also be explored to reduce that alienation even more, and attention to these public areas is needed quite as much as attention to private law relationships. Whether support by public policy of the symbolic baggage of homeownership--its nostalgia, its status connotations, its assumed linkage with suburban housing--is desirable is, on balance, a moot point.

VI

Social alienation is the final concept to be considered here as relevant to residential policy. Space permits only one illustration of the usefulness of the concept in housing policy. The illustration to be taken is homeownership policy, since it is a key feature of housing policy and one of the few that has been defended as related precisely to the type of ultimate issues that the concept of social alienation encompasses. First, a word on the concept itself.

Social alienation we have defined as the separation of man from his social being. Man is essentially social as well as individual. "His human life is his social life." Alienation from other men is as serious a form of alienation as alienation from the product of labor. Egoistic man is "an individual separated from community, withdrawn into himself, wholly preoccupied with his private interest and acting in accordance with his private caprice...the only bond between egoistic men is natural necessity, need and private interests, the preservation of their property and their egoistic persons."³⁴

Hegel's conception is formulated by Schacht as follows:

"One who limits his self-conception to his particular self also turns away from the social substance...he seeks to develop his particular nature and character and to assert his independence, as completely as possible--at the expense of unity with a substance. He closes his eyes to his essential universality, and 'is proud and self-satisfied in this alienation.' There is just as great a disparity between his 'existence' and his 'inner nature' as there is in the case of the other worldly individual."³⁵

To the extent that modern housing in fact leads to such isolation, such egoism, it contributes further to the alienation of man from man.

Homeownership has been put forward as a means of attacking precisely this form of alienation. Providing the occupant with "a stake in the community," making a "better citizen," are among the stated goals of public homeownership programs. From Madison, who held that "The Freeholders of the country would be the safest depositories of Republican liberty"³⁶ to Jefferson, who wrote to Madison that "the small landholders are the most precious part of a state,"³⁷ to Andrew Johnson, who supported the Homestead Act because it "would create the strongest tie between the citizen and the Government,"³⁸ to others like Senator Percy, who many years later and in quite different society spoke of a homeowner becoming a "more steadfast and concerned citizen of his community,"³⁹ homeownership, participation of community life, and civic virtue have been linked; George Wallace's American Independent Party summed up the general consensus in saying, in its 1968 platform:

"We will support programs designed to provide means by which home ownership can become a reality for our city dwellers, thereby instilling a greater feeling of dignity, stability and responsibility in those benefiting from such a program."⁴⁰

The evidence certainly seems to support the assumptions under-

lying these statements. There is a statistical correlation between homeownership and those outward-oriented, community-viewing, participatory upwardly mobile, forms of behavior that at least crudely could be taken as indications of lack of social alienation. Yet correlation is not cause. But the question always remains whether homeownership itself is causally related to these patterns of behavior, or whether these patterns might not already have existed in the individual and produced ownership as well as the other visible signs of integration into the community. Let me here simply suggest three reasons to at least question the conventional wisdom that homeownership fosters community-mindedness and reduces social alienation.

Economics is the mechanism most likely to be put forward in attempting to explain why homeowners have a greater "stake in their community" than do tenants. I have elsewhere⁴¹ argued that the economic stake of the homeowner is much less substantial or secure than many lower-income families assume, and that an investment in some other asset may be in fact much more expedient for many. I have further argued that such an investment is not a feature of the owner's occupancy of the home, but only of the ownership of it; an owner-occupant might in fact be much better off moving to a rented unit and leasing the house he/she owns to a more affluent family. Be all that as it may, it is no doubt true that having an economic investment in a home gives many families an increased interest in what happens in their community.

This economic interest, however, has negative as well as positive concepts. The economic aspects of homeownership appeals to an essentially selfish view. If the house is partially an investment, then its value hinges on what its owner can get for it, and is independent of his/her relationship with neighbors or the community. A housing shortage and overcrowding in the neighborhood may be exactly what a money-conscious homeowner would most like to see? ⁴²

The social relationships generated by homeownership likewise have their ambivalent aspects. Community spirit there certainly often is. The self-generated activities of home improvement associations, as well as traditional across-the-back-fence neighborliness, attest to this. So do the militant activities of many community property-owner associations when faced with what they see as a threat to their community. But the negative aspects of this solidarity appear clearly when that threat is, for instance, simply the entry into the neighborhood of a family of different ethnic background. Community within a given homogeneous group is engendered; isolation and antagonism and alienation from broader segments of society may be equally created by homeownership in its traditional form. The ugly type of snobbishness, exclusivity, conformism, rejection of the different, the unconventional, the new, that we find pervading our suburban communities, are certainly added

to in large part if not created by homeownership. 43

The linkage between homeownership and the single-family house may also have alienating by-products for reasons of technology. 44 Single-family homeownership permits and fosters an internalization of many activities that in an earlier day were public and external, and that for most apartment dwellers, for different reasons, still are. The earlier swimming hole, the church social, the volunteer fire company, the public laundry, are replaced for the modern upper-income suburban family by the private swimming pool, the recreation room, the private fire alarm system, the washer and the drier in the basement. In the new towns of California, usually a misnomer for glorified suburban developments, a far broader range of activities is internalized and made private: security protection, golf courses, marinas, yard maintenance, and so forth. While the link between private homeownership and this trend to internalization and privatization is not inevitable, it is strong, and runs against the integration of the individual into the broader life of which his immediate neighborhood and his individual house is a part.

Finally, and perhaps obviously, a homeownership program that fails is worse than no program at all. Promise a low-income family "a home of its own," give it a comfort and a status and a pride it never had, spread out before it a future of peace and security and independence, and then let it find itself in a jerry-built little house, suddenly bombarded with leaky roofs, warped doors, broken windows, weedy lawns, peeling paint, splintered woodwork, plumbers and electricians and painters, bills and taxes and assessments, and finally, defaults on a mortgage and foreclosure, and the family may be expected to be a little more socially alienated than before it started. The recent investigations of abuses of the Section 235 program are rapidly finding this out. *

More broadly put--and this summarizes the criticisms of homeownership suggested in this paper--a program that encourages homeownership for lower-income families as a solution to the problems of residential alienation, without seeing those problems in the total social context, without giving the full range of support that is needed to make them effective, without coupling them with an attack on alienation in the community and the society as a whole, is bound to fail. The shelter theory of housing is a totally inadequate explanation of the problems of housing today. The concept of residential alienation provides a much more realistic framework for a more accurate analysis and a more effective program. Homeownership is at least a move in the right direction, in its recognition that the entire network of relations between a person and his dwelling must be taken into consideration; not only whether the dwelling keeps out the rain, but whether it helps to express his individuality, whether it carries his mark, whether it brings

him closer to or further from his fellowmen. But obviously a much more comprehensive program than one of fostering homeownership is needed fully to overcome alienation in these ways. To claim that "the mere act of becoming a homeowner transforms a man" is not only wrong; it is pernicious.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Arthur Solomon, Housing the Urban Poor, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974).

² Chester Hartman, "The Housing Allowance Delusion," Social Policy, Jan./Feb. 1974, pp. 31-37. cf. also Dick Netzer, Economics and Urban Problems, (New York: Basic Books, 1970) pp. 73 ff.

³ Frank DeLeeuw, "The Housing Allowance Approach," U.S. Congress, Papers Submitted to the Subcommittee on Housing Panels, 92nd Congress, 1st Session, 1971.

⁴ Architectural Forum, Vol. 106, No. 5, May 1957.

⁵ Commentary, April 1965, pp. 29-37.

⁶ Journal of the American Institute of Planners, XXX, No. 4.

⁷ The Report of the Kaiser Commission (A Decent Home: Washington, 1968) embodies the theory as well as any other recent public document.

⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Housing, 1960, "Definitions."

⁹ University of California Press, Berkeley, 1970.

¹⁰ "Introduction," Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society (New York: Dell, 1962), p. 13.

¹¹ Clearly a prior positive relationship has to be assumed before alienation can take place. As Kenneth Keniston points out, this usage implies "an assumption that some relationship or connection that once existed, that is natural, desirable, or good, has been lost." (The Uncommitted, 452). It is thus comparable also to what Schacht calls Hegel's "first" use of the term, as signifying "separation," (Richard Schacht, Alienation (New York: Doubleday, 1970).

¹² No pretense is made to philosophic accuracy in the discussion that follows. The concept of alienation itself is an exceedingly complex one, with a rich history and a diverse set of usages, many of which

have been documented by Richard Schacht (op.cit.) , a somewhat narrow but detailed treatment of the subject from which some of the present discussion is drawn. The justification for wrenching the concept of alienation from its philosophic footings and applying it to problems of housing policy is that the justification is very provocative in housing terms, however incongruous or obtuse it may seem to the philosopher¹.

¹³ Schacht, op. cit., p. 38.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Schacht, op.cit., p. 75.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Schacht, op.cit., pp. 76-77.

¹⁸ Schacht, op.cit., p. 75.

¹⁹ Comparable for purposes of this discussion only; Engels, at least, clearly takes the position that the relationship between landlord and tenant is entirely different from that between employer and worker, not being a class but a commercial relationship, more analogous to that between a shopkeeper and a customer.

²⁰ Schacht, op. cit., pp. 76-77.

²¹ Schacht, op. cit., p. 75.

²² From personal interviews with leaders both in the pre-cut and modular housing industry.

²³ Even the possibility of a creative role in designing a house available to the owner who hires an architect and general contractor is probably seldom realized in the present state of the architectural profession where the architect is more likely to express his creativity in the house than in his client.

²⁴ Martin Meyerson, Barbara Terrett, William L.C. Wheaton, Housing People and Cities (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962).

²⁵ It is also generally, but erroneously, assumed to require homeownership. It may indeed require the financial resources that are more likely to be associated with the average homeowner's income group than the average tenant's; the form of tenure is by itself relevant only to the

financial return the occupant may get on his work, not to the creativity he can put into it. There is no motivation for a landlord to prohibit a tenant from making improvements that the tenant would want to make were he himself the owner.

²⁶ Bruno Bettelheim, for instance, has the nice story about the man who "moved to the suburbs to get away from city pavements and enjoy a more natural setting. The first summer his front lawn was full of dandelions and he rather liked the color and naturalness they added. But his neighbors had spent money and care to have perfect lawns and they objected to the weeds that would soon go to seed and spread to their lawns. After several experiences of this kind the man ruefully moved back to a city apartment." *The Informed Heart: Autonomy in Mass Age*, (Glencoe, The Free Press, 1960), p. 92n.

²⁷ *White Collar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 224.

²⁸ It is a moot question to what extent improvements are motivated by the hope of ultimate economic benefit and to what extent they arise from either the expectation of pleasurable use or the pure pleasure of the work. The point here is simply that the ultimate economic return is a factor in most decisions--the bigger the improvement, the bigger the weight of the economic factor--and when economic benefit and the pleasure of use conflict, there arises precisely that internal conflict that is associated with alienation. Robert A. Nisbet in fact attributes the origin of contemporary alienation to a lack of congruence between what would strengthen the individual's sense of community and identity, on the one hand, and what the functioning of the larger social system requires, on the other. *The Quest for Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953).

²⁹ Of course, the rules of private law and their enforcement are also socially determined, but the distinction is useful in practice.

³⁰ "The Legal Attributes of Homeownership for Low and Moderate Income Families," (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Working Paper 209-1-1, 1972).

³¹ Senator Charles Percy, Campaign Address, "A New Dawn for Our Cities," Chicago, September 15, 1966, printed in *Congressional Record*, October 16, 1966. It was Senator Percy who later introduced the Home Ownership Foundation bill, part of the effort that led to the adoption of Section 235 in 1968.

³² Sen. Percy, *op. cit.*

³³ Coleman and Neugarten, for instance, say: "Americans tend to re-

gard housing as the foremost visible indicator of a family's level of economic well-being," (p.92) "...home ownership is virtually a surrogate for quality housing." (p. 37). Social Status in The City. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1971).

³⁴Schacht, op. cit., p. 80.

³⁵Schacht, op. cit., p. 42.

³⁶The Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787, Gillard Hurst and J.B. Scott (eds.), International Edition, 1920.

³⁷Letter to James Madison, October 28, 1785.

³⁸Congressional Globe (Appendix), June 20, 1850, p. 951.

³⁹Loc.cit.

⁴⁰Congressional Record, October 15, 1968, p. E 9212. These and other comparable quotations may be found collected in the Appendix to Expanded Ownership, (Fond-du-Lac, Wis., The Sabre Foundation, 1972).

⁴¹"Home Ownership for Low Income Families: Financial Implications," (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, April 1972); and "Homeownership for Low Income Families," Land Economics, May 1972.

⁴²Glazer and Moynihan speak of the ideological outlook of small homeowners "as being in opposition to high taxes, welfare programs, ...and 'frills' in the building of schools (art murals), in favor of a conservative financial policy, and without any views of the general problems of the city. Such views are hardly necessary (speaking of New York Controller Gerosa) when one's major concern is the neighborhood and its homeowners." Beyond the Melting Pot (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1970), p. 214. But the conservative ideological stance of the homeowner hardly needs documentation.

⁴³Tenancy, of course, creates tensions, hostilities, and antagonisms also. The point here is not that tenancy is less alienating than homeownership, but only that there are significant alienating features about homeownership.

⁴⁴The impact of single-family dwellings on land use patterns, open space, transportation problems, and social and economic discrimination, is also important in relationship to social alienation, but outside the scope of this paper.